

# The Sikh Martyrs

## Part 2

1763 - 1947

## Introduction to the Part Second.

Martyrdom is voluntary and conscious sacrifice of one's life for a noble cause without caring for any material inducement. The word martyr is derived from the Greek word 'martyros' which means witness, A martyr is one who accepts death with courage as a witness to his faith. The Arabic word 'Shahada' or 'Shahadat' also means to see, to witness, to testify or to become a roll model. According to the Muslims, a (Shaeed) martyr witnesses the truth, stands by it firmly in struggle (Jihad), sacrifices his life and thus becomes a role model for others. He is promised paradise after death

In Sikhism, the concept of martyrdom is elevated to a new heights Sikh history is full of examples where all kinds of worldly rewards and promises of paradise (after death) were offered, but

the Sikh martyrs rejected them for the sake of their religion and country. They sacrificed their lives knowingly and voluntarily for selfless and noble causes such as truth, righteousness, freedom of belief and resistance to tyranny. They did not attach any importance to their physical mortal existence. They desired that future generations should have self rule and not accept the dictates of overlords. They were standard bearers of the honor of their religion and country. While they suffered a lot, they also inspired others to be brave and to live with dignity.

Inhabitants of the Punjab, especially the Sikhs, remained in vanguard of the struggle for freedom of their country. They fought against the Mughals to keep the flame of their freedom burning. Soon after the annexation of the Punjab, they fought to liberate the country from the foreign rule. Many movements like the Gurddwara Reforms Movement were started. During these movements, people were mercilessly killed and many died in prisons. It is sad to note that we have not done much to remember and honor our martyrs. Many of us have not even heard the name of Bhai Maharaj Singh, the first martyr who showed the path of sacrifice to the freedom fighters of 1857. Many Sikhs are unaware of the names of four Sahibzadas, sons of the Tenth Master, who set an example of martyrdom at a tender age. If we forget their unique sacrifices, we will not be inspired and will become cowards.

Keeping this in view, I wrote the part first of the ‘Sikh Martyrs’ dealing up to 1762 in 1997. Since then, I have written and published seven books and have gained a lot of experience. As desired by my readers, I have written its second part covering up to 1947 and have selected only 13 important martyrs/incidents. I know many have been left and I apologize to them. I have tried to be brief and to the point to save readers’ time. I have included multiple-choice question and their answers at the end of every chapter to retain the attention of my readers.

I am glad that I took up this job as it required me to read about a dozen source books which I would not have studied otherwise. List of these books is printed at the end. I am thankful to the authors of those books for their valuable contribution. I am also thankful to Dr. Onkar Singh Bindra for giving useful suggestions.

In the end I bow my head to all the martyrs for setting a noble example. I hope the book will be read with interest, especially by young readers, and would inspire them to follow the footsteps of martyrs. I am open to suggestions and will welcome criticism.

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## **Sikh Martyrs – Part Two (1763 – 1940)**

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## Bhai Maharaj Singh

The part played by saint soldier, Nihal Singh alias Maharaj Singh in organizing resistance against the British in the Punjab before 1857 should be written in golden letters. He left a rich legacy for the freedom fighters of India. He was a worthy son of the Punjab who was deported by the British and died in prison outside India, but did not yield. Documents left by the British show that Maharaj Singh led an armed struggle against them from 1846 to 1850. They have written that had they not caught him in time, they would have been thrown out of India.

Maharaj Singh, a saintly person turned revolutionary, was born at village Rabbon in Ludhiana district in 1780. He belonged to a well to do family. He had a religious bent of mind. He received religious education from Saint Teja Singh and Saint Sumand Singh. ‘Nihal’ is a Punjabi word which means to please someone. He actually pleased the persons with whom he came in contact as he had a sweet tongue. He was smart and had an impressive personality. He was always busy in meditation and service of humanity. Saint Sumand Singh found that Nihal Singh was not an ordinary man, so he sent him to Bhai Bir Singh of Naurangabad, district Amritsar.

He was baptized by Bhai Bir Singh and Named Bhagwan Singh. There he served devotedly as head cook in the community kitchen for 12 years. While distributing food, he politely and repeatedly addressed everybody as Maharaj (Your Majesty), so people started calling him Maharaj Singh. According to Pandit Sher Singh, sometimes as many as 20 thousand persons took food from the community kitchen at the seminary (DERA) of Bhai Bir Singh. Maharaj Singh was known as a symbol of service and meditation. After the death of Bhai Bir Singh, he succeeded him as head of the DERA and was held in high esteem by a large following including the Sikh chiefs. Even Bhai Khuda Singh, a senior follower of Bhai Bir Singh, proposed his name and said “. Maharaj Singh who is devoting his whole time in meditation and service is the most suitable person to shoulder this responsibility”.

In 1843, five years old Prince Dalip Singh was enthroned as ruler of the Punjab with an advisory committee to help him. His mother, Mahrani Jindan, was given pension and was instructed not to interfere in the state affairs. In fact, Henry Lawrence, the British Resident at Lahore, was having his own way and was running the administration. Lord Dalhousie, the

Governor General of India, also wanted to bring the kingdom of Punjab under the British and instructed the Resident that hostile demonstration against the British must be crushed.

It was at this crucial moment that Maharaj Singh came forward to lead the people of Punjab against the British. These conditions made this great religious missionary an equally great freedom fighter. He handed over the DERA of Naurangabad to Bir Singh, the Junior, one of his disciples and himself moved to Amritsar. He mostly remained busy touring the villages. He was the person who took upon himself the impossible task of saving the sovereign kingdom of Punjab from extinction.

Maharani Jindan respected Maharaj Singh as he was a great Sikh personality and successor of Bhai Bir Singh. Her servants and messengers often visited him. The Resident doubted these relations and thought that Maharani and Maharaj Singh were plotting a conspiracy against the British. The British considered Maharaj Singh as an obstacle in their plan of annexing the Punjab and wanted to arrest him by hook or crook. In the meantime there was a rumor of 'Prema Conspiracy' for killing Henry Lawrence, the British Resident, and other officers when they assembled in the Shalimar Garden, Lahore. Prema, Rani Jindan and Maharaj Singh were said to be involved in this. After an enquiry, Prema was sentenced to death and warrants for the arrest of Maharaj Singh were issued, but Maharani Jindan was acquitted. The government announced a reward of ten thousand rupees for his arrest and his property was confiscated. Thus a revolutionary career started in the life of Maharaj Singh and he went underground. Anyone who offered shelter to Maharaj Singh was to be imprisoned and fined. Rani Jindan was separated from Maharaja Dalip Singh and sent to the fort at Sheikhupura in August, 1847.

Maharaj Singh intensified his activities against the British and raised the standard of revolt after the banishment of Rani Jindan and revolt of Governor Mool Raj at Multan. He speedily collected many thousand men when he received an urgent appeal from Mool Raj and left for Multan in April, 1848. But soon differences arose between them and he left Multan for Hazara to seek help of Chatar Singh Attariwala who had revolted to dislodge the British. Maharaj Singh traveled from Multan to Hazara at the risk of his life as he was hotly pursued by the British forces. The British, however, came to know about his movements only after he had reached Hazara. Raja Sher Singh was sent by the Resident at Lahore to arrest Mool Raj at Multan. Maharaj Singh persuaded Sher Singh to fight against the British and not to go to Multan. Maharaj Singh joined Sher Singh's forces at Ram Ngar. He also

secretly won over the confidence of Prince Ranbir Singh, Governor of Jammu.

During the battles of Ram Nagar, Chillianwala and Gujrat fought against the British, Maharaj Singh used to move about among the soldiers, riding his black mare, and inspired them to fight the enemy with courage and determination. He exhorted them to lay down their lives for the sake of their country. He had also taken upon himself the difficult task of maintaining supplies of food for men and fodder for animals engaged in the operation. For this purpose, he opened a number of supply centers. He took part in the battles of Chalianvala and Gujrat. After the defeat in the battle of Gujrat, rebel Sikh chiefs decided to surrender to the British, but Maharaj Singh resolved to carry on the fight single-handed. Col. Rachhpal Singh also followed him and did not surrender. Now Maharaj Singh escaped to a village in Jammu and established his secret headquarter there.

He proved a shrewd statesman and did not lose heart. His first task was to restore confidence in the minds of the Sikhs, who as the result of defeats in battles and the annexation of the kingdom, had been demoralized. He was pained to learn that Maharaja Dalip Singh had been dethroned and the British planned to move him to a distant place in India so that, in future, rebels did not get an opportunity to rally in the name of their legal sovereign .He had to fight on a number of fronts to succeed in his difficult mission. He planned to take away Maharaja Dalip Singh from Lahore to a place in the hills and to restart freedom struggle in his name. He also planned to organize a united front of all persons who had suffered at the hands of the British and to forge an alliance between the rebels and the Mir of Kabal and Pathans, He also sought the support of all the important Sikh and Hindu priests and saints for the freedom struggle. He planned to disrupt the new government by surprise attacks on treasuries and cantonments. For this purpose he visited Sikh regiments retained by the British. He left nothing to chance and did not leave any stone unturned to achieve these objectives. He sent ambassadors to the Amir of Kabal and various Pathan chiefs who with the help of the Sikhs repulsed the British forces.

British were too powerful and too crafty for Maharaj Singh. They foiled his plan and removed Dalip Singh from Lahore to a distant place in India as the plan of Maharaj Singh was leaked before it was executed, In spite of all this, Maharaj Singh decided to revolt and gathered a large number of followers. 3rd January, 1850 was fixed to start the revolt, but an informer leaked the plan and Maharaj Singh was caught unawares six days before the fixed date. He was imprisoned at Jalandhar, but the government did not want to take any risk and deported him to Singapore. After a few

years of confinement there, he died a miserable death on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1856, He had gone blind before his death.

Mr. Vanissttar, the Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar, who had arrested him, remarked," He is to the natives what Jesus is to the most zealous of Christians." He was so greatly impressed by him that he recommended a special treatment to be accorded to him. Mr. Macleod, Commissioner Doab, in his report dated 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1850 calls him Guru and writes," It appears to me in certain that Goroo was in some respects a very remarkable man. He seems to have possessed and exhibited very great sagacity and self reliance." He was also of the opinion that another factor which qualified Maharaj Singh to take up the leadership of the movement was the moral courage that he possessed in an eminent degree.

It is gratifying to note that the movement for national emancipation did not die as a result of the failure of this great patriot. Maharaj Singh has left a rich national and spiritual legacy behind, for his noble role, the name of this saint soldier of Naurangabad should remain enshrined in our hearts. It is sad that the government has not built any memorial for him. An eye hospital in a village near Adampur where he was apprehended would be a fitting memorial.

#### Questions.

1. What kind of person was Maharaj Singh?
  - a) He was the head of a robber's gang.
  - b) He was a politician.
  - c) He was a saint soldier and freedom fighter..
2. In which year was he born?
  - a) 1756. b) 1780 c) 1740,
3. In which year did he die?
  - a) 1856 b) 1880 c) 1820
4. Why was he fighting against the British?
  - a) The British annexed the Punjab into their kingdom.
  - b) They wanted to kill him as he was a bad man,
  - c) They did not grant him pension.
5. Where did he die?
  - a) In a village near his home.
  - b) In a forest where he was hiding.
  - c) In prison in Singapore.
6. Why was he arrested and imprisoned?
  - a) He was a notorious robber.
  - b) He organized people and fought for the freedom of his country.

- c) He did not pay the land revenue.
7. Why could not he succeed?
- a) He was lazy.
  - b) The British were more powerful and his comrades surrendered.
  - c) He had no following.

Answers.

1.c 2.b 3.a 4. a 5. c 6.b. 7. b

## Baba Ram Singh Namdhari

Baba Ram Singh, son of Sardar Jassa Singh and Sardarni Sada Kaur, was born on February 3, 1816 at village Bhaini Araian, district Ludhiana. His father worked as a carpenter in his village. Baba Ram Singh received his elementary education and learnt Gurbani in his village. He was married to Bibi Jassan, a religious lady. He helped his father and learnt carpentry from him. In 1837, his brother-in-law (sister's husband), Sardar Kabul Singh, who was a gunner in the artillery of Maharaja Ranjit Singh took him to Lahore. He got Baba Ram Singh recruited in the regiment of Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

In 1845, the Sikh army was defeated in the battle of Mudki by the British due to the betrayal of some Sikh generals. Baba Ram Singh took this defeat to heart and resigned from the army service and came back to his village. During the period of service, he visited Hazro where he met a Sikh saint, Baba Balak Singh and became his follower. Baba Ram Singh was very perturbed at the duplicity all around him.

At his village, he started a grocery shop and also dealt in cloth and iron. He turned to religion, meditation on God's name, and started preaching the worship of one Almighty God. He founded a religious body named 'Sant Khalsa' in 1857. Later it was named 'Namdhari' as its followers meditated on God's Name. Its members were also known as 'Kukas' as they recited God's name or sacred hymns loudly and shrieked. He wanted to reform the corrupt Mahants and priests who controlled the Gurdwaras then. As a result of this, they were dead against him. Due to his intense piety, he had many admirers. During his tours, huge crowds gathered to listen to him. At Baisakhi and Maghi festivals, he addressed huge gatherings of thousands. His following grew very rapidly. He divided the province into twenty-two divisions and each division was placed under a governor (Suba).

Some Sikhs were still indulging in Hindu practices like idol worship. Baba Ram Singh preached the Sikh gospel with great fervor. He tried to check the cultural impact of foreign rule and Christian missionaries. He advised his followers to hate cow slaughter, not to eat meat, to give up

worship of the dead, idols, memorials raised over cremation spots and graves, to keep off intoxicants and to spend the least on marriages. He was in favor of widow remarriage. The increasing number of his followers and his popularity alarmed the British rulers of India.

Baba Ram Singh and his followers were placed under police surveillance. This act of repression and official interference in their daily activities provided a shot in the arm of the movement. Now it took the form of a political and revolutionary organization. Baba Ram Singh asked his followers to boycott the British institutions, such as schools, colleges, post offices and courts. He also advised them to boycott the British goods. He instructed them to settle disputes by reference to the village councils. His followers spun their own cloth and dressed themselves in pure white cotton cloth. His preaching was a threat to the British system. His call for boycott of all British things affected the British economy adversely.

As the movement spread, the number of followers of Baba Ram Singh continued to increase and he lost control of some members of his group. He believed that change could be brought by peaceful means, but a small group of Namdharies attacked graves and memorials, raised over cremation grounds. The followers of Baba Ram Singh, who had deep sentiment of reverence for the cow, had strongly resented the opening of beef shops in the sacred city of Amritsar. They murdered four Muslim butchers and injured three of them in Amritsar in June 1871. The police could not catch the attackers as they attacked at midnight. Next year in July, they again attacked the butchers at Rai Kot, district Ludhiana, where three butchers were killed and ten were injured. The police traced out the assailants of the butchers of Amritsar and Rai Kot. After a summary trial, four of them were hanged and two were exiled to the Andaman Nicobar islands. In his statement before the commissioner of Ambala Division on January 18, 1872, Baba Ram Singh stated that these murders took place against his orders to refrain from such acts.

On January 15, 1872, over 100 Namdharies attacked Malerkotla to kill butchers, but the police stopped them. In the confrontation, eight policemen and seven Namdharies were killed. The police rounded up sixty-six Namdharies at Maler Kotla. By the orders of Mr. Cowan, Deputy Commissioner Ludhiana, forty-nine Namdharies were blown by cannon fire and one was cut to pieces with a sword. In fact Mr. Cowan had already made up his mind to teach the Namdharies a bitter lesson. So, he took this drastic action without

any trial or any approval from his bosses. Sixteen more Namdharis were blown up by fire from the mouth of the cannon on January 18, 1872 by the orders of the Commissioner, Ambala Division. Regarding the killing of 63 Namdharies in 1872, Sir Henry Cotton wrote in his India and Home Memories’ “ I can recall nothing during my service in India more revolting and more shocking than these executions, and there were many who thought as I did.”

According to the report of the above mentioned commissioner, Baba Ram Singh stated that he ‘strenuously forbade them [the attackers] nevertheless, they perpetrated the crime.’ Baba Ram Singh was blamed for not informing the police. Baba Ram Singh had also established his contacts with the ruler of Nepal and Kashmir with a view to strengthening his anti-British movement. Mr. Cowan wrote that it was absolutely necessary that the repressive measures should be prompt and stern.

After the Malerkotla affair, the entire Namdhari movement was outlawed. A police post was set up at Bhaini, the headquarters of the movement, and all prominent leaders including Baba Ram Singh were arrested. Baba Ram Singh and many of his deputies were immediately deported to Allahabad and detained there. His residence at Bhaini was searched by the police, but no dangerous weapons were recovered. In fact, the Punjab government was greatly alarmed and foresaw another 1857. The government feared that Baba Ram Singh would remain in touch with his followers while at Allahabad. Consequently, he was exiled and detained in Burma (now Myanmar) and some of his followers were sent to the Andaman Nicoba, Islands. Baba Ram Singh remained in Burma as a state prisoner

During his detention in Burma, he kept in touch with his followers through letters and messengers. He used to say, “I am only a messenger and not a Guru.” He also stressed this point in his letters from the jail to his followers. But they started calling him Satguru and still call him Satguru. Perhaps they copied the Sodhis and Bedis who also called their leaders Guru. He had a fragile body and was five feet and ten inches tall. He was a religious and social reformer. After his death, the ‘Singh Sabha Movement’ was started in order to continue his mission of reformation. He directed the attention of his followers to Sri Guru Granth Sahib and baptized many Sikhs. He believed in working and not depending on others. He did not like that his leftover food should be taken by others. He was against child

marriage and female infanticide. He believed in simple and pure life. His followers mostly wear simple white clothes and lead a pure life. He adopted the method of non-cooperation and boycotting of foreign goods long before Mahatma Gandhi.

### Questions

1. In which year was Baba Ram Singh born?  
a) 1814 b) 1816 c) 1818
  
4. Why was he imprisoned?  
a) He had killed Muslim butchers.  
b) The Government thought that he would bring a revolution.  
c) He conspired against the state.
  
5. What are his followers called?  
a) Pure Sikhs. b) White Sikhs c) Namdhari.
  
6. What did he achieve in his life?  
a) Nothing b) He left a lot of wealth.  
c) He brought a social and religious reform.
  
7. Who was the first to use non-cooperation and boycott against the British rulers?  
a) Mahatma Gandhi. B) Baba Ram Singh c) Neither of them

### Answers

1 .b      4. b 5. c 6. c 7 . b

Kartar Singh Sarabha

Kartar Singh Sarabha was one of the most outstanding and the youngest martyrs of the Punjab in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He willingly and selflessly laid down his life for the freedom of India.

He was born in 1896 in the village Sarabha, in the district of Ludhiana, so he is called Sarabha. He was the only son of his father, Sardar Mangal Singh. He received his early education in his village school, and studied up to the ninth grade in Ludhiana. He passed his 10<sup>th</sup> grade examination from Orissa, where he lived with his relatives. He joined a college, but gave up his studies due to his father's untimely death. He was more interested in sports than in studies. He was an extrovert whom everyone wanted to befriend. He was a leader in the school and other students wanted his guidance.

After he passed his tenth grade, he read many books about his country and the world. In those days, national consciousness was growing among Indians. He was influenced by the wave of awakening that was then prevailing in Orissa and Bengal. He became an ardent nationalist. He planned to go to the United States of America. His family also wanted him to go abroad to earn a lot of money. In the beginning of 1912, he arrived at the port of San Francisco. At the port, he noticed that American immigration authorities questioned the Indian immigrants rigorously and humiliated them while people coming from free countries were treated politely and were not asked the same cumbersome questions. He found that it was due to India being a slave country. His young and sensitive mind realized the difference and decided to do everything for the freedom of his country.

In the United States, he took up the work of picking fruit in orchards near San Francisco. Soon he realized the difference between the citizens of a free country and those of a slave country. It pained him greatly. With the help of Bhagwan Singh and Hardayal, he held a conference of Indians in the United States in June 1912 and decided that everyone should work for the freedom of India. They formed a party, named "Ghadar Party," with its office at 429 Hill Street, San Francisco. A newspaper named Ghadar (Mutiny) was published in Punjabi. He was not only its editor but also its composer and clerk. Later on, some other people shared his burden and the paper was also printed in Hindi, Urdu, Gujrati and Bengali. It was the first paper to represent the Indian working class in the USA. It propagated the cause of freedom of India and awakened Indians from their deep slumber. The paper was also sent to Indians living in other countries.

The paper awakened Indians and filled their minds with the spirit of independence. They sang songs of freedom and wanted to see their country free. The Ghadar Party became famous and it consisted of members from all

communities. In 1914, World War I began. Sarabha thought that it was the proper time to do something for the freedom of the motherland and the Ghadar Party declared war against the British in an issue of its paper in August 1914.

Members of the Ghadar Party were returning to India but they were arrested at the ports as the Indian government suspected them of spreading ill will against the government. Sarabha also returned to India in September 1914 and reached Punjab, escaping the eye of the police. He visited most of the Punjab, and prepared people for united action against the government. He worked with great vigor for revolution in the country. Funds were collected by every means and arms were purchased. He opened branches of the party at many places and organized an army of revolutionaries. He, with Prithi Singh Azad, Harnam Singh, and Amar Singh, established secret contacts with Indian soldiers in different military cantonments. Many soldiers assured them that, in the event of revolt, they would stand by them.

In a conference, February 21, 1915 was fixed as the day to launch the rebellion. Unfortunately, one of their friends, Kirpal Singh, proved a traitor. He disclosed the plan to the government. Consequently, thousands were arrested in police raids at different places on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, and imprisoned in Lahore Central Jail under strict supervision. Suspected soldiers in the army were disarmed. The whole plot was frustrated. Thus the second struggle for the nation's freedom failed.

Kartar Singh Sarabha, along with Harnam Singh and Jagat Singh, could not be caught, and fled to the North West Frontier. They were out of danger, but Sarabha did not want to run away when many of his comrades were behind bars. He convinced his companions that their behavior was cowardly and persuaded them to return. He did not like to leave his comrades in the lurch. While coming back, he, along with his companions, was arrested near Sargodha, and imprisoned. He planned to break the jail, but his plan leaked before time. His cell was searched and several weapons were found in his cell.

He was tried under the First Lahore Conspiracy Case of 1914-1915 and charged with sedition. He was totally indifferent to the outcome of the case and took the entire blame upon himself. The judge was astonished to see a young boy behaving so fearlessly. The judge advised him that his statements could send him to the gallows. The lion-hearted Sarabha said, "I

know these statements can get me the death sentence, which I prefer to a life term, so that when I am reborn I would again fight against the British imperialism. I do not believe that I have committed any sin.”

The judge wrote in his judgment, “Kartar Singh is the most dangerous rebel. He is determined and proud of his actions. He has not denied the charges leveled against him. He is associated with every aspect of the conspiracy and deserves no mercy.” He was sentenced to death and to confiscation of his property on November 16, 1915. On hearing it, Kartar Singh danced with joy. He was really undaunted and it is proved by the fact that he gained fourteen pounds of weight rather than losing due to fear of death. He was hanged in 1916.

Questions:

1. In which year was Sarabha born?
  - a. 1894
  - b. 1896
  - c. 1898
2. In which year did he die?
  - a. 1916
  - b. 1920
  - c. 1914
3. How did he die?
  - a. He died a natural death.
  - b. He was killed in police confrontation.
  - c. He was hanged.
4. Why did he leave India for the United States?
  - a. To earn money.
  - b. For sightseeing.
  - c. For further studies.
5. Why was he anti-British?
  - a. The British government did not give him employment.
  - b. The British government had confiscated his property.
  - c. He wanted the British to leave India.

6. How old was he when he was hanged?
  - a. Above 20, but less than 30..
  - b. About 20.
  - c. Above 30.
7. What was the name of the political party he set up?
  - a. Ghadar Party.
  - b. Union Party.
  - c. Workers Party.
8. Why did he return when he had escaped from the police raid?
  - a. It was not safe to go further.
  - b. He fell ill.
  - c. He did not want to leave his comrades behind bars.
9. How did he face the death sentence?
  - a. He was sad.
  - b. He was undaunted.
  - c. He was crying

Answers:

1. b 2. a 3. c 4. a 5. c 6. b 7.a 8. c 9. b

### Martyrs of Tarn Taran

The Gurdwara at Tarn Taran, 10 miles from Amritsar, was founded by Guru Arjan Dev in 1500. Besides being a place of worship, it was also a special refuge for lepers who still visit this Gurdwara to get cured after a dip in the holy tank. The Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak committee (S.G. P. C) a religious organization to reform the management of the Gurdwaras, came into existence on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1920.

After taking the management of the golden temple and the Akal Takhat and restoring their sanctity, the committee turned its attention to the Gurdwara at Tarn Taran. It was here that the Akalis had to shed their blood for the first time for reforming the managements of the Gurdwaras.

The Mahant controlling the Tarn Taran Gurdwara had introduced many evil practices in the Gurdwara. According to an eye witness, the moral degradation of the Mahant had reached its climax by 1920. He treated the Gurdwara as his shop. Some priests were found drunk while in attendance of the Holy Granth. As stated in the biography of Bhai Jiwan Singh Vaid

(Page 175) and ‘Gurdwara Reform Movement’ (Page 198), women’s honor was not safe in the Gurdwara. A lady who visited the Gurdwara complained to the S.G.P.C. in January 1921 that a priest of the Gurdwara at Tarn Taran threw her son into the pool and molested her daughter. This annoyed the Akalis. The Mahant had become a dictator on assurance of support by C.M.King, the Commissioner of the Lahore Division. Priests divided the income of the Gurdwara among themselves.

Mohan Singh Vaid, a local leader of the reform movement, asked the Mahant to improve his ways. Lachhman Singh Dharowali, a well known leader of the reform movement, also made a similar attempt, but the Mahant did not care. He even beat the members of the local squad of reformers who approached him to arrange for the recitation of the Asa Di Var. The immoral practices at Tarn Taran and the arrogant and indecent behavior of the Mahant towards visitors required immediate and strict action. The S.G. P. C decided to take the management of the Gurdwaras in its own hands.

In January 1920, a squad of 40 Akalis under the leadership of Teja Singh Bhuchar reached Tarn Taran. This alarmed the priests whose number is said to be 70. They tried to provoke the Akalis who remained calm and non-violent. The Mahant agreed to the formation of a joint committee to settle the dispute. They accepted the proposal put before them and agreed to sign a written agreement when it was brought to them. In fact, it was a trick and the Mahant wanted to gain time to prepare for the attack.

On January 20, 1921, while the Akalis were waiting for the documents to be signed, at 9pm the dead drunk priests attacked the peaceful, unarmed and unsuspecting Akalis. Some Akalis were seriously wounded as the priests used daggers, bricks and sticks. The holy Gurdwara was smeared with the blood of the wounded Akalis. Two of them, Hukam Singh of district Gurdaspur and Hazara Singh of district Amritsar embraced martyrdom in the Gurdwara.

On receiving the news of the fight, the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of police with force and other officials reached the Gurdwara. They found that the Akalis were not to be blamed. The priests were not allowed to re-enter the Gurdwara, which came into the hands of the S.G.C.P. on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1921.

#### Questions

1. Who was controlling the Gurdwara at Tarn Taran before S.G.P.C. took its charge?  
A) Local Sikhs. B) a Mahant C.) Government
2. What type of person was the Mahant?  
A) He was a nice man

- B) He was not interested in the Gurdwara  
C) He was a corrupt and immoral person
- 3) Who was the leader of the volunteers who came to persuade the Mahant to improve?
- A) Teja Singh Bhuchar  
b.) Mehtab Singh  
c) Harnam Singh
- 4) What was the result of the talks with the Mahant?
- A) The Mahant yielded and handed over the control of the Gurdwara.  
B) The Mahant received the compensation  
C) The Mahant agreed to sign the agreement, but backed out and attacked the volunteers
- 5) How did the Akalis behave when attacked?
- A) They fought and killed a priest  
B) They remained calm and non-violent  
C) They ran away
- 6) How many Akali volunteers embraced martyrdom when priests attacked?
- A) Two  
B) four  
C) Six
- 7) In which year the control of the Gurdwara at Tarn Taran came into the hands of S.G.P.C.?
- A) 1925  
B) 1915  
C) 1921

Answers:

- 1)b 2)c 3)a 4)c 5)b 6)a 7)c

## Martyrs of Nankana Sahib

After the execution of Banda Singh Bahadar in 1716, Sikhs were persecuted by the Mughal Emperors and their Governors in the Punjab. Consequently, Sikhs along with their preachers were forced to live in jungles, away from the populated areas. The control of the Sikh shrines fell into the hands of Udasis, who professed Sikhism but did not conform to its outward symbols. Some of them established institutions and became owners of their Gurdwaras. They nominated one of their followers (Chelas) as their successor. They were called Mahants. Most of them were religious minded and led a simple life. With the passage of time, after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, this system deteriorated and these Mahants gave up the tradition of purity and austerity. An increase in their income, resulting from revenue-free lands bestowed on most of the historic Gurdwaras by the Sikh rulers and chiefs.corrupted them. They enjoyed the patronage of the British government .For example, after the tragedy of Jallianwalla Bagh in 1919, the Sarbrah (officially appointed in-charge of the Golden Temple, Amritsar) invited General Dyer, the man responsible for the tragedy, to the Golden Temple and honored him.

Mahant Narain Das of Gurdwara Nankana Sahib treated himself as owner of the Gurdwara erected at the birthplace of Guru Nanak. He led a life of luxury and turned the Gurdwara into his private property. He had the backing of the local British officials whom he bribed. He drifted towards an irreligious and immoral life. He indulged in drinking and adultery. He had illicit relations with the wife of a Muslim drummer. He invited dancing girls and permitted profane singing in the sacred Gurdwara on the occasion of the marriage of his nephew. Some of the female worshippers who came to pray at the Gurdwara were raped by the Mahant and his followers. Protests lodged with the authorities were not heeded. The moral degradation of the Mahant had reached its climax by 1920.

The Gurdwara Reform Movement by the Akali reformers had started and they had, already, taken control of some Gurdwaras including the Golden Temple by that time. Nankana Sahib Gurdwara attracted their attention. They called upon the Mahant to reform. At a meeting held at village Dharowali in October 1920, the Mahant was asked to improve his ways and cleanse the administration of the Gurdwara. But instead of reforming, the Mahant began to recruit a strong force of 400 mercenaries to resist the Akali movement. Arms, ammunition, and kerosene oil were stored. One hundred *pathans* were kept ready to strike when required. The

Mahant called a meeting of sixty other Mahants and, in this meeting, he was made president. It was decided to resist the Akali movement and a newspaper named “Sant Sewak” was started to carry on propaganda against the Akali movement. It was all well-known to the British authorities.

Akali leaders did not want to depart from the policy of non-violence. They called upon the Sikhs to assemble at Nankana Sahib from March 4-to 6, 1921to press upon the Mahant to reform. The Mahant showed signs of compromise and agreed to meet a five member committee of the Akalis on February 7, but failed to attend. Two subsequent meetings arranged with his consent in the second week of February were also not attended by him. In fact, he was gaining time. The Akalis came to know that the Mahant had changed his mind and had hired hooligans to attack the Akali leaders on March 6, when they assembled at Nankana Sahib.

Lachhman Singh Dharowali, Kartar Singh Jhabbar and Butta Singh, Akali leaders of the Nankana Sahib area, decided to march to the Gurdwara before the Mahant’s plan was put in action. Lachhman Singh Dharowali, with his group of 150, reached Chandarkot near Nankana Sahib on the night of February 19, 1921. Kartar Singh Jhabbar collected 2200 Sikhs and was to join him. When senior Akali leaders came to know of it on February 19 at Lahore, they decided that no group should reach Nankana Sahib before March 5. Kartar Singh Jhabbar was stopped before he started, but Lachhman Singh Dharowali could not be contacted in time. He did not like to waste time, but before going further he got a promise from all the members of his group to remain non-violent, come what may. They prayed for the success of their noble cause. When they were about to proceed, Waryam Singh arrived and showed them the letter from the Sikh High Command. The group decided not to turn back after taking resolve to proceed in the Ardaas (prayer).

The group led by Lacchman Singh Dharowali reached Nankana Sahib early in the morning of February 20, 1921. They took baths and entered the Gurdwara. Lachhman Singh Dharowali sat behind Guru Granth Sahib and the group started singing Asa Di Var ( morning prayer). The Mahant had already got the news and was well-prepared. He signalled his men to close the main gate and start firing .Sixty members of the group sitting inside the Gurdwara became targets of the bullets while twenty-five sitting in the courtyard were killed by the bullets fired from the rooftops. Dharowali was wounded and dragged out. He was tied to a tree and burned. The Mahant’s men cut to pieces any Sikh still found breathing. At that time, Dalip Singh was sitting in the factory of Uttam Singh outside the city. He heard the firing, and along with Waryam Singh, rushed to the Gurdwara. When they

reached the Gurdwara, the Mahant's men shot Dalip Singh to death and killed Waryam Singh with swords. The Mahant asked his men to collect all the bodies, pour kerosene oil on them, and cremate them.

Uttam Singh conveyed the news by telegram to the authorities and the Sikh leaders at Lahore. The deputy commissioner and the Commissioner with force reached the Gurdwara in a few hours. They arrested the Mahant with his followers and locked the Gurdwara. On February 21, Kartar Singh Jhabbar with 2200 Sikhs arrived and demanded the keys of the Gurdwara, which were handed over to him the next day. Bodies of 130 martyrs were cremated according to the Sikh tradition. The Mahant and his helpers were given different punishments by the courts. The Mahant was sent to Andaman Nicobar islands. Many of his helpers were imprisoned, and three of his companions were hanged.

Kartar Singh Jhabbar in Shahidi Diwan (memorial service) held on March 3, 1921, pointed out that the happenings of Nankana Sahib had awakened the Sikhs from their slumber and the march towards independence had been quickened. Maulana Shoukat Ali, a prominent leader, held the government responsible for the mischief and rebuked the *pathans* for helping the Mahant. Mahatma Gandhi, in his brief speech, condemned the cruel deed of the Mahant and praised the Akalis for their passive resistance. He described the martyrdom of Akali reformers as an act of national bravery. The press also condemned the Mahant and his helpers. A famous Urdu daily (Zamindar), published from Lahore, on February 23, 1921 remarked in its editorial: "What more proof of shamelessness of the Muslims is required than that they have helped the Mahant. O, shameless Muslims, isn't the cup of your shamelessness and impudence full as yet? You used your guns and swords against those who went to Nankana Sahib to perform their religious duties. You are not fit to be called Muslims. You are worse than infidels."

I would like to pay my tributes to Lachhman Singh Dharowali, the leader of this group of the martyrs by writing a few lines about him. He was the son of Mehar Singh and was born in 1886 at village Dharowali. His father was in the army of Prince Nau Nihal Singh and later on joined the police department under the British. Dharowali was a very healthy young man, six feet tall with a well built body. He was a good athlete and wrestler. He was married to Bibi Inder Kaur, daughter of Budh Singh in 1901. He had a son named Harbans Singh. He was religious minded and it pained him to find deplorable conditions prevailing in the Gurdwara at Nankana Sahib. In October 1920, in a huge gathering at Dharowali, he got a resolution for

reform of the Gurdwara at Nankana Sahib passed. He was closely connected with the reform movement and led many groups for the liberation of various Gurdwaras. In January 1921, he, with other Akali reformers, took control of the Gurdwara Taran Taaran from the corrupt Mahant. At that time, he prayed that he would be happy if he laid down his life to improve the affairs of the Gurdwara at Nankana Sahib and God fulfilled his desire.

## Questions

1. Who was the leader of the squad that entered the Gurdwara Nankana Sahib?
  - a). Uttam Singh
  - b) Dalip Singh
  - c) Lachhman Singh Dharowali
2. On what date did he enter the Gurdwara?
  - a. March 20, 1921
  - b. February 20, 1921
  - c. March 18, 1919
3. Why did they go there?
  - a. To pray
  - b. To warn the Mahant
  - c. To take control of the Gurdwara .
4. Which arms did they have with them?
  - a. Guns
  - b. Nothing
  - c. Swords
5. If they did not take any arms, what was the reason?
  - a. They could not buy arms
  - b. They had sworn to remain non-violent
  - c. They were not allowed to enter with arms
6. How was the leader of the group killed?
  - a. He was shot, tied to a tree, and burned
  - b. He was shot to death while sleeping
  - c. He fell down and died
7. Who controlled the Gurdwara at that time?
  - a. Sikhs
  - b. Public
  - c. Mahant Narain Das.
8. What type of person was the Mahant?

- a. A saintly person
  - b. An irreligious man who led an immoral life
  - c. An ordinary man
9. What was the demand of the Akali reformers?
- a. The Gurdwara should be managed by the Sikhs.
  - b. Government should take control of the Gurdwara
  - c. The Mahant should run the Gurdwara as the government desires
10. What was the result of the march of the Akalis?
- a. The Mahant did not yield
  - b. All the members of the group were killed but the Mahant was imprisoned and the Gurdwara was handed over to the reformers
  - c. The government took over control of the Gurdwara.
11. What was the importance of the Gurdwara?
- a. It was in the central Punjab.
  - b. It had a beautiful building
  - c. It was built at the birthplace of Guru Nanak.

Answers: 1) c 2) b 3) a 4) b 5) b 6) a 7) c 8) b 9) a 10) b 11) c

## Martyrs of Guru- Ka- Bagh

The Akali struggle at Guru –Ka- Bagh is a landmark in the history of the Gurdwara Reform Movement. Here the Akalis demonstrated the efficacy of the weapon of non-violent and peaceful resistance. Patient sufferings of the peaceful Akalis and their firm faith won the sympathy of all the Indians and shook the authorities who realized that immoral and brutal use of power was ineffective against the non-violent spiritual struggle of the Akalis.

About 12 miles from Amritsar, there are two Gurdwaras in memory of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur. After the ninth Master planted a garden, this place was called Guru –Ka- Bagh ( Guru's Garden). In 1921 it was a mere grove of Kikar trees The Gurdwara was in the possession of MahanSundar Das, who kept two mistresses, Isro and jagdei ,and indulged in immoral practices. He had also illicit relations with other women of bad reputation. When The Golden Temple and some other Gurdwaras came under the control of the S.G.P. C, the Akali reformers turned their attention towards Guru- Ka-Bagh.

On 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1921, some Sikhs under the leadership of Dan Singh persuaded the Mahant to improve his ways He agreed to serve under a committee of 11 members appointed by the S.G.P.C and to take Amrit. After the massacre at Nankana Sahib, the Mahant went back on his promise and indulged in old practices. Consequently the S.G.P.C took over the management of the Gurdwaras in August, 1921.

As usual, some Sikhs cut a dry Kikar tree from the land attached to the Gurdwara for cooking the meals in the community kitchen (Langar). The Mahant complained to the police. The state authorities used this minor incident as a convenient excuse to suppress the Akalis. Five Sikhs were arrested and sentenced to six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs.50 each. The S.G.P.C felt that this was a gross violation of the Sikh rights as the land belonged to the Gurdwara. This insignificant incident became an issue between the powerful government and peaceful Akalis supported by the public opinion.

The S.G.P.C. organized agitation on a scale hitherto unseen in the Punjab. To assert the right to chop wood from the land attached to the Gurdwara for the free community kitchen and to protest against the official high handedness, squads of five volunteers each started marching from the Akal Takhat to Guru-ka-Bagh. A wave of enthusiasm spread in the whole state and volunteers started coming from far and wide. The spectacle became reminiscent of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Sikh history. The number of volunteers increased and in the last week of August, the number of persons courting

arrest was above 200 daily. Every morning, the prospective members of the squad assembled at the Akal Takat and took a solemn vow to go for sacrifice and under all circumstances to remain non-violent in word and deed. Following a short sermon in which they were to recall the sacrifices of their ancestors, they would march in formation to Guru-Ka-Bagh singing scared hymns. There was distinct rivalry amongst the volunteers to see who would sacrifice the most. Spectators would line the roads leading to the shrine, offer them water and shower them with flower petals.

The squad had to pass various areas and bridges where the volunteers were stopped by police and beaten with sticks in order to disable them from proceeding further. They would sit down on the ground singing, ‘Waheguru, Waheguru, Satnam, Satnam ji.’ They would continue till they all became unconscious or exhausted due to severe beating. They were dragged and kicked. Such fierce beating was faced by the Akalis on daily basis and not once was the oath of non-violence broken. These men had the choice to have their beating stopped, but they chose to remain true to their vow. All those who managed to reach Guru-Ka-Bagh were beaten mercilessly and arrested on charges of riots, theft and trespassing. Soon the officials realized that arrest and long sentences could not overcome the Akalis as the number of volunteers who courted arrest had swelled to 4,000. The Akali gatherings at Guru-Ka-Bagh were declared unlawful assemblies. Carriers taking supply were also prevented and the provisions and the medical supplies were seized. Squads were prevented from reaching Amritsar by rail or road. All the preventive measure failed, the agitation continued and the wave of enthusiasm spread.

The increasing use of brutal force on non-violent Akalis had a great impact on the public. Prominent Hindu and Muslim leaders and members of Legislative Council visited the Guru-Ka-Bagh. Representatives of papers like Manchester Guardian, London Times and National Herald also witnessed the brutal behavior of the police. Their statements and reports, when published in newspapers in India and aboard, aroused public opinion against the brutal policy of the Government. An American cinematographer, captain. A.L. Verges filmed the beatings of the Akalis and produced a short film entitled “Exclusive picture of India’s Martyrdom”. He described the Akali struggle unique in human history and a peaceful rebellion against the authority.

In a public meeting attended by many thousands at Jallianwala Bagh, Pandit..Madan Mohan Malaviya criticized the Gov. Policy and wanted immediate end to it. C.F, Andrews, a Christian missionary, in his eye -witness account of the struggle and sufferings at Guru-Ka-Bagh, described

the official action as' inhuman, brutal, foul, cowardly and incredible to an Englishman and a moral defeat of England'. During his meeting with the Governor of the Punjab, he told him that he had seen with his own eyes hundreds of Christs being crucified at Guru-Ka-Bagh..

All these factors forced the Government to change the method of operation against the Akalis, but the aim of suppressing the movement and to break the Akali organizations did not change. The Government decided to take future official action at a remote place to avoid publicity. Army was called to help the police. Long barbed wire entanglements were erected around the place under dispute. To decrease the time that a constable took to disable an Akali, a booklet was published. Police were trained in administering blows on the private parts of the body.

These measures did not discourage the Akalis and the number of those courting arrest increased. The Akalis treated the march to Guru-Ka-Bagh as a pilgrimage. Total number of arrested Akalis had gone up to 8000 and jails could not accommodate them. The Akali squads contained a large number of ex-soldiers. In the end of October and beginning of Nov. 1922, squads of military pensioners courted arrest. It was likely to create excitement in the Sikh units of the Indian Army. There was a rumor that the Sikh students of the Khalsa College, Amritsar would also march to Guru-Ka-Bagh. Propaganda in the press, reports of national leaders, statements of press representatives and publicity committee of the S.G.P.C. exposed the police brutality and unnerved the Govt. All these factors alarmed the Govt. and need for an immediate solution to save further loss of prestige was under consideration of the Govt.

The Govt. persuaded and encouraged a retired Govt. engineer, Sir Ganga Ram to lease the disputed land of the Gurdwara from the Mahant. In Nov. 1922, he leased the land and allowed the Akalis to cut wood. Police were withdrawn from the Guru-Ka-Bagh and barbed wire around its enclosures was removed. The Akalis took the possession of the land. The Govt. released the Akali prisoners arrested in connection with this struggle.

This suddenly ended the long struggle in which more than 1500 Akalis were injured and over 5000 were put behind bars. The Govt. had opened a new front at Guru-Ka-Bagh to regain the loss of prestige and wanted to deliver a severe blow to the Akali organization, but received a setback.

### Questions

1. Who was controlling the Gurdwaras at Guru-Ka-Bagh before the struggle started?

- a) Public b} State c} Mahant Sundar Das.
2. What type of man was the Mahant?
- A} He was an ordinary man.
- B} He was pleasure seeking and irreligious.
- c) He was a saintly person.
- 3) In which year did the struggle start?
- A) 1921 B) 1920 C) 1942
- 4) Why were the Akalis arrested?
- A) They were trespassing
- B) They were cutting wood from the dry trees for the common kitchen of the Gurdwar from the land attached to the Gurdwara
- C) They were fighting with the villagers
- 5) Name the Christian Missionary who remarked, I have seen hundredsof Christs being crucified at Guru-Ka-Bagh?
- A) Johnson
- B) Thomas
- C) F. C. Andrews

Answers:

- 1) c 2)b 3)a 4)b 5)C

## Martyrs of Panja Sahib

Panja Sahib (Hasan Abdal) is a railway station about thirty miles from Rawalpindi towards Peshawar, now in Pakistan. Guru Nanak Dev visited this place on his way back from Mecca and Madina. Hasan Abdal is the name of a Muslim saint. He is also known as Vali Kandhari (saint of

Kandhar, a city in Afghanistan). Mardana, a companion of Guru Nanak, was thirsty and wanted some water from the spring owned by Vali Kandhari, who refused. On this, Guru Nanak Dev asked Mardana to lift a stone and he found a fountain of water. Vali Kandhari, who lived uphill, became angry as water in his spring started depleting. Angry Vali Kandhari pushed a big rock towards Guru Nanak, which he stopped by touching it with his hand. So the city is called Panja Sahib, as the rock has the big print of Guru's hand even today. There is a beautiful Gurdwara built in the memory of Guru Nanak there.

This Gurdwara was in the possession of a corrupt Mahant. A squad of Akali reformers under Kartar Singh Jhabhar from Amritsar reached Panja Sahib in November 1920 and started performing kirtan in the Gurdwara. The Mahant asked them to leave the Gurdwara and his supporters started abusing the members of the squad. A clash started. In the meanwhile, local sympathizers of the reformers reached and took control of the Gurdwara.

In 1922, a non-violent agitation by Akali reformers at Guru-ka-Bagh (described in the last chapter) was in full swing. Akalis were courting arrest and suffering from the repressive measures of the government. On October 25, 1922, an Akali squad of 101 military pensioners from Kapurthala district, under the leadership of Subedar Major Amar Singh, courted arrest. Its members were mercilessly beaten and stripped so completely that nothing but (kachhairs) underwears were left on their persons. They were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment of two and a half years with a fine of one hundred rupees each on October 29, 1922. They were sent by train to the Central jail at Attock.

The Sikhs at Panja Sahib got ready with food and drink to serve the squad. They took the food etc. to the railway station early in the morning of October 30, 1922 and waited for the train. The station master told them that the train would not stop at the station and that they were waiting in vain. They requested the station master to stop the train, but he refused to oblige them. At this, they said "Guru Nanak Dev stopped a rock with one hand. If we are his Sikhs, we will stop the train and serve the innocent and hungry members of the squad."

Seeing the train approaching, Partap Singh, 25 years old, priest of the Gurdwara Panja Sahib, and Karam Singh, a 30 year old pilgrim from Anandpur Sahib, lay on the railway line. Ganga Singh, Charan Singh, Nihal

Singh, Tara Singh, Fakir Singh, Kalyan Singh, and many other male and female volunteers squatted on the track. Seeing this, the driver of the train blew whistles again and again, but those lying on the track did not move as they had not heard the whistles. The engine crushed the bones of Partap Singh and Karam Singh, who embraced martyrdom .Many others were injured. The train stopped for ninety minutes. The dead bodies and the injured were cared for. The hungry Singhs were served whole-heartedly.

The train driver, when asked why he had stopped the train, replied, “When the engine hit the persons lying on the railway line, the vacuum lever dropped out of my hand and the train stopped. I did not apply brakes”. The news of this tragedy shook the whole community. Countless people visit Panja Sahib every year to pay homage to the martyrs.

### Questions

1. Why did the Sikhs want to stop the train at Panja Sahib?
  - a) They wanted to board the train.
  - b) They wanted to feed the innocent and hungry passengers.
  - c) They wanted to loot the passengers.
2. What method did they apply to stop the train when the station master refused?
  - a) They lay on the railway line when they saw the train approaching.
  - b) They put heavy logs and stones on the line.
  - c) They kidnapped the station master.
3. Who were the passengers in the train?
  - a) They were prisoners of war.
  - b) They were victims of a flood.
  - c) They were arrested at the Guru-ka-Bagh in a non-violent movement.
4. How many persons sacrificed their lives to stop the train?
  - a) Two
  - b) Four
  - c) Six
5. Which Guru visited Panja Sahib?
  - a) Guru Arjan Dev

- b) Guru Gobind Singh
- c) Guru Nanak Dev

6. Why is the city called Panja Sahib?

- a) There are five rivers flowing near the city.
- b) Guru Nanak stopped a large rock with his five fingers.
- c) Five saints are said to be the founders of this city.

7. In which year did the tragedy at Panja Sahib take place?

- a) 1923
- b) 1924
- c) 1922

#### Answers

- 1. b
- 2. a
- 3. c
- 4. a
- 5. c
- 6. b
- 7. c

### Martyrs of Jaito

The struggle at Jaito is another landmark in the history of the non-violent Akali movement. Here, they demonstrated the efficacy of the weapon of non-violence and nationalism. Their strong faith shook the authorities whose immoral use of force was met with the sufferings of peaceful Akalis. Their sufferings inspired national leaders like Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru to join them in their struggle.

Jaito is a town near Batinda on the Ferozepur-Batinda railway line in the Punjab. At the time of the struggle, it was in the erstwhile Nabha State (now part of the Punjab province). The ruler of the Nabha State, at that time, was Ripudaman Singh. He was independent-minded. He was sympathetic to the Akalis in their struggle for the liberation of the Gurdwaras from corrupt Mahants who were supported by the British government. He declared the day of February 20 a holiday in the state in honor of the martyrs of Nankana Sahib. His attitude deeply troubled the British. In 1912, at the time of succession to the throne, he asserted that his succession to the throne was a matter of right and needed no British sanction or ceremony. It was not liked by the British government.

Bupinder Singh, ruler of the Patiala State, adjacent to the Nabha State, was pro-British. He was not on good terms with the ruler of Nabha. The Patiala-Nabha dispute over certain territories and many other issues was the main cause of ill-will between them. The British officials did not hold a fair inquiry. They forced the ruler of Nabha to abdicate in favor of his minor son in July, 1923..

This forced abdication of the ruler of Nabha led to a stormy protest among the people of the state. Many newspapers like “The Akali” and “The Nation” also condemned the acts of high-handedness of the British.

In the proceedings of the Indian National Congress Session held in December 1923, it was remarked that the ruler of Nabha was deposed not for his shortcomings, but for his virtues. The Akalis treated it as a side-attack on their movement. The Akali Dal and the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee took up the question of the restoration of the Maharaja. They fixed 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1923 as a day of prayer for the restoration. A telegram was sent to the viceroy demanding an independent inquiry. The subsequent reminder was also not acknowledged by the government. In August 1923, the S.G.P.C. condemned the government’s action and decided to get justice for the Maharaja by all peaceful and legislative means.

The administration of Nabha prohibited meetings within the state to address the issue of restoration. The Akalis continued to hold meetings in the Nabha state to condemn the official action. One such meeting was held at Jaito and the state arrested some of the organizers. Now the state Akali workers started an Akhand Path (continuous reading of Sri Guru Granth Sahib) at Gurdwara Gangsar in Jaito to pray for the restoration of the rights of the ruler. State soldiers, under the orders of the British administrator of the state, forcibly dispersed the people gathered at the Gurdwara and interrupted the Akhand Path by dragging the person reading the Holy Granth. This incident led to strong agitation by the Sikhs who refused to tolerate interference in their right to worship freely. It was an open challenge, which the S.G.P.C. and the Akali Dal accepted. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1923 they decided to agitate and to court arrest for freedom of worship.

To begin, squads (Jathas) of twenty-five members each walked to Jaito from Amritsar daily, after taking a pledge of nonviolence in thought, word, and deed, before the Akal Takhat. The government of Punjab declared the S.P.G.C. and the Akali Dal unlawful associations and arrested their sixty members. The Jathas were beaten mercilessly and arrested as soon as they entered the boundaries of the Nabha State. The members of the Jathas, as testified by Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, gave amazing exhibition of courage and endurance. They neither retreated nor raised their hands against the police. They were kept in custody in inhumane conditions for a few days. After that, they were freed three hundred miles away in the deserts of Rajasthan State. This could not stop the Akali activity. Within a period of a few months, more than five thousand Akalis courted arrest. Many of them lost their lives, but the result was not satisfactory.

To intensify the agitation, the S.G.P.C. decided to send bigger squads of five hundred each. The first squad of 500 left Amritsar on February 9 1924. It was ordered to reach Jaito on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February to coincide with the third anniversary of the Nankana tragedy. Every member of the squad pledged to remain perfectly nonviolent, come what may. All the members of the squad, in their saffron attire, in lines of four, were reciting hymns and shouting slogans. A band preceded the squad followed by five beloved ones, each carrying a saffron flag and the palanquin of Guru Granth Sahib was in the middle. The nonviolent march of the unarmed squad was unique. It was watched by thousands. Every member of the squad was garlanded by villagers on the way who served them milk, water, fruits, sweets and food.

According to Mr. Zimand, Editor of the New York Times, who joined the squad near Jaito, the squad was moving in perfect order and it was unarmed. There were large crowds of public on the right and left. When the squad reached a distance of one hundred and fifty meters from the Gurdwara, Wilson-Johnson, the administrator of the State, arrived and ordered it to stop, but the squad continued to march. The administrator ordered to open fire, which continued from three sides for five minutes. Many members of the squad fell dead or were wounded, but the squad moved on.

The dead or the wounded were not attended by the State authorities. Many of the wounded died for lack of medical attention and water. Dr. Kehar Singh, the man in charge of medical arrangements for the squad, was arrested. Dr. Kitchlew and Principal Gidwani, who also accompanied the squad to watch, took care of the dead and the wounded. According to S.G.P.C., there were three hundred casualties, including 70 to 150 dead. Many were arrested. They were tortured in a special torture chamber. In spite of these tortures, the agitation continued and the sixteenth squad of five hundred left Akal Takhat on April 17, 1925. Before that squad reached the Gurdwara Gangsar, the government yielded. The Gurdwara Act was passed. Arrested Akali leaders and workers were released. Freedom to hold Akand Path was granted. The Akalis performed not one, but one hundred and one Akhand Paths.

The press applauded the Akalis for their sacrifices and condemned the administration. It was said that General Dyer is reborn in the person of the administrator. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi expressed their sympathy with the Akali cause. He sent the following message on the occasion, "I need hardly assure the Akali Sikhs of my sympathy in the loss of so many brave

men and many more being wounded.” Public meetings were held in all the big cities in India and official action was condemned by popular leaders.

Pt. Jawahlal Nehru, along with Mr. Santhanam, visited Jaito to find out the truth of various allegations made against the Nabha State administration. They were also not allowed to cross the boundary of the state. They were ill-treated, arrested, and put behind bars. The following few lines were written by Pundit Nehru from the Central Jail in Nabha on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1923.

‘I rejoice that I am being tried for a cause which the Sikhs have made their own. I was in jail when the Guru-ka Bagh struggle was gallantly fought and won by the Sikhs. I marveled at the courage and sacrifice of the Akalis and wished that I could be given an opportunity of showing my deep admiration of them by some form of service. That opportunity has now been given to me and I earnestly hope that I shall prove worthy of their high tradition and fine courage. ‘

Sacrifice of a young lady, Balbir Kaur, deserves special mention. Ladies were not allowed to proceed with the squad. A few insisted and were allowed on their plea that they would cook food on the way. Balbir Kaur, with her two year old son, was their leader. After the first stop, it became clear that the services of the ladies for cooking food would not be required. The leader of the squad wanted them to return home. Others agreed, but Balbir Kaur pleaded with tears in her eyes, “Brother, don’t stop me from participating in this noble struggle.” The leader did not want to break her heart and agreed reluctantly. Before entering the Nabha State, the leader again asked her to go back. She replied with folded hands, “Brother, don’t stop me. Our Guru had bestowed equality on women. If you are worried about my child, let him also serve the community.” All tried to persuade her, but she did not budge from her decision to march to death with others. Thus the leader accepted her request.

Suddenly, a bullet hit her in the forehead and her face was covered with blood, but she continued to march. Another bullet pierced the child through his ear, and the child died instantly. She kissed the child and placed his dead body along with the other dead bodies saying, “Oh God, take back your charge temporarily entrusted to me.” Suddenly a bullet hit straight her chest and pierced her body. She fell dead on the ground, but her soul joined her child. Her bloodied face showed peace and courage. She became immortal.

**Questions:**

1. What type of person was the ruler of Nabha?
  - a. He was pleasure-seeking and did not care for the people of the state.
  - b. He was independent minded and in favor of the Akali struggle for reform of the Gurdwaras.
  - c. He blindly obeyed the British.
2. Why did he leave the throne?
  - a. He was not keeping good health.
  - b. People were not happy with him.
  - c. He was forced by the British to abdicate in favor of his minor son.
3. In which year did he abdicate?
  - a. 1923
  - b. 1922
  - c. 1924
4. What was the reaction of the people of the Nabha State?
  - a. People protested against this forced abdication.
  - b. People were happy to get rid of him.
  - c. There was a mixed reaction.
5. How did the Akalis treat it at first?
  - a. They were indifferent.
  - b. They sided with the British.
  - c. They condemned the high handedness of the government and pleaded for the restoration of the ruler.
6. Why was the Akhand Path at Jaito disrupted by the Nabha police?
  - a. They were reciting loudly.
  - b. It was for the restoration of the ruler of Nabha.
  - c. People complained against it.
7. What were the demands of the Akalis when they sent squads to court arrest?
  - a. They wanted some favors from the British.

- b. They wanted to rule the Nabha state.
  - c. They wanted no state interference in the right of worship and justice for the ruler of the Nabha state.
8. What did the Akalis do to get free right of worship?
- a. They refused to pay revenue.
  - b. They sent squads of nonviolent, unarmed volunteers from Amritsar to Jaito to start an Akand Path.
  - c. They started killing State officials.
9. How did the Nabha police treat the protesting squads?
- a. They were not allowed to enter the Nabha state, were beaten mercilessly and fired upon.
  - b. They were ignored.
  - c. They were prosecuted in court.
10. What was the result?
- a. The state did not yield.
  - b. The Akalis discontinued the agitation when they saw no hope of success.
  - c. The state yielded, released all the prisoners, and granted permission to worship and hold Akhand Path.
11. How long did the agitation last?
- a. Less than six months.
  - b. About twenty-one months.
  - c. Between six to twelve months.

Answers:

- 1. b
- 2. c
- 3. a
- 4. a
- 5. c
- 6. b
- 7. c
- 8. b
- 9. a
- 10. c
- 11. b

## Martyrs of the Babbar Akali Movement

The contribution of the Sikhs to the struggle for freedom of India was much more than the combined contribution of all other Indian communities. The population of the Sikhs before 1947 was 1.5% of the population of India, but their contribution in the independence movement was more than 50%. Like other movements for freedom started by the Sikhs, the Babbar Akali Movement was a major movement. Sardar Kishan Singh Gargaj was its founder.

The Babbar Akali movement started when the peaceful and non-violent struggle for the liberation of Gurdwaras was passing through a critical stage. A radical section of the Akali reformers, not satisfied with passive sufferings, organized themselves into separate militant groups known as the “Chakarwari Dals.” Later they were called Babbar Akali Jathas. “Babbar” means the lion and “jathas” stands for groups.

These militant groups, which included a large number of returned immigrants and demobilized soldiers, were against the imperialist policies of the British Government and their measures of repression against popular movements like the Gurdwara Reform Movement. The tragedies of Jalilanwala Bagh and Nankana Sahib, and the official support of the Mahants (priests of Gurdwaras) further disillusioned them. They gave up the non-violent methods used by Akalis. These zealots parted company with the dominant Akali leaders and started a militant movement. They also felt that the weapon of non-violence and non-cooperation was an attempt to kill the struggle of peasants against imperialism. The sphere of this movement was confined mainly to the district of Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur.

This group held its first formal meeting on May 21, 1921 at Hoshiarpur. It was attended by Kishan Singh Gargaj, Master Mota Singh, Tota Singh, Gurbachan Singh, Amar Singh and other enthusiastic members. It was decided: 1) to create an awakening among the people through the medium of speeches in religious gatherings and to spread discontentment against the foreign rulers by distributing leaflets; 2) to collect men, arms, and ammunition; 3) to establish regular contact with the revolutionary movements inside and outside of the country; 4) to eliminate certain persons and condemned enemies of the Gurdwara Reform and Independence Movements.

These revolutionaries moved from place to place explaining their viewpoint to the people in the province and making passionate appeals to the people to rise in rebellion against the foreign rulers. In August 1922, a monthly cyclostyled paper, "Babbar Akali Doaba Newspaper," was started to achieve this objective. Two active workers of the group succeeded in procuring arms from the North-West Frontier. Bela Singh and Ganda Singh were deputed to murder J.W. Bowring for his involvement in the Nankana tragedy, but they failed in their attempt as they could not locate him. They were arrested and subsequently many other members of the party were captured. Kishan Singh managed to dodge the police.

Kishan Singh, the moving spirit behind the movement, announced a detailed program in his speech at a fair held in a village in district Sangrur and aroused the martial instincts of the Punjabis by quoting from Zafar Namah of Guru Gobind Singh. Thus he strengthened the Babbar Akali Movement and intensified its revolutionary spirit among the peasants. He pleaded with important Babbar leaders in charge of various Jathas to organize conferences at different places.

In August 1922, at a general meeting of all the groups of the Babbars, Kishan Singh was elected its Jathedar (head). In December 1922,

Kishan Singh held another meeting of all the groups. He pointed to the satisfactory and favorable climate created due to the Babbar's propaganda. He stressed the need to eliminate those who wanted to sabotage the movement. The working committee made the following decisions: 1) the working committee was to decide when and by whom a particular enemy of the movement was to be murdered; 2) children and women of such persons were not to be touched; 3) members were not allowed to touch the belongings of the innocent persons, but they were allowed to loot the property of the government, the toadies, and notorious money lenders. All the wealth thus collected was to become the common fund of the party 4) only those who were prepared to execute the orders of the working committee were allowed to join the party.

The Babbars murdered many informers and sympathizers of the British. They created panic and unnerved the authorities. The Government arrested some important organizers like Kishan Singh through information supplied by the informers. The government took special measures to meet the challenge and to restore confidence. Help of the military was also taken. The Babbars were proclaimed an unlawful association. Handsome rewards were announced for ensuring quick arrests of the Babbar leaders. Some leaders were betrayed by their relatives and friends and were arrested. Dhanna Singh, an important Babbar leader, was arrested due the betrayal of one of his friends. But before being arrested, he exploded a bomb and killed seven policemen including an officer.

Numerous murders of government officials and the informers caused anxiety and questions were raised in the British Parliament about the deteriorating conditions and law-and-order in the Punjab in 1923. Consequently, the Punjab government adopted strict measures against the movement. By mid-June 1924, as many as 186 arrests were made and most of the Babbar leaders were put behind bars or killed. On February 28, 1925, six Babbars were hanged and ten were exiled to Andaman-Nicobar Islands. Many were imprisoned for different periods.

Though the Akali leaders disowned the Babbars and their methods, the Babbars contribution to the success of the Akali Movement cannot be denied. They increased the bargaining powers of the Akali leaders by terrorizing the bureaucratic machinery and thus compelling the government to come to terms with the Akalis. The Babbar Akali Movement made it easy for the Akali leaders to liberate the Gurdwaras from the vested interests who

were supported by the Punjab government. The successful struggle for the liberation of the Gurdwaras paved the way for the freedom of India.

A few lines about the founder of the movement, Kishan Singh Gargaj, will not be out of place. He was born in village Birang in the Jalandar district. He joined the army, but the tragedy of the Jallianwala Bagh in 1919 pained him so much that he started preaching against the British while in the army. Consequently, he was court-martialed, but instead of tendering an apology, he resigned from the army. In 1920, he was elected General Secretary of the Akali Party. In February 1921, when more than 100 Sikhs were butchered at Nankana Sahib, he gave up his faith in non-violent struggle, adopted violent means, and found a new party, which he named Babbar Akalis.

In February 1923, he was arrested as a result of betrayal by Kabul Singh, who belonged to his own village. He was imprisoned in the district jail of Mianwali under strict supervision without any trial. On February 2<sup>7,1926</sup> he delivered an impressive speech in the prison . Addressing his fellow prisoners, he said, “We are lucky to be among those who will be hanged for the freedom of their country. We are happy that we have performed our duty to our Motherland.” On the same day, Kishan Singh, along with his five companions, Karam Singh, Santa Singh, Nand Singh, Dalip Singh and Dharam Singh, was hanged in the central jail at Lahore. Thus, they attained martyrdom. Their dead bodies were cremated on the bank of the river Ravi on the backside of the Gurdwara Dera Sahib in Lahore. He was Called ‘Gargaj’ for his powerful manners of speaking.

## Questions

1. Who was the founder of the Babbar Akali Movement?
  - a) Karam Singh
  - b) Sant Singh
  - c) Kishan Singh
2. In which year did he start the movement?
  - a) 1921
  - b) 1919

- c) 1924
- 3. Why did he leave the army?
  - a) He was low-paid.
  - b) He resigned as he did not want to tender an apology for preaching against the government.
  - c) He was ignored.
- 4. Why did he part company with the Akali leaders?
  - a) He was not paid well.
  - b) He was ignored by Akali leaders.
  - c) He strongly believed that non-violent methods could not succeed.
- 5. How did he die?
  - a) He was killed in an encounter.
  - b) He was hanged.
  - c) He died a natural death
- 6. Where did he die?
  - a) In prison.
  - b) In exile
  - c) At home.
- 7. In which year did he die?
  - a) 1929
  - b) 1926
  - c) 1927
- 8. How many Babbars were hanged by the government?
  - a) 12
  - b) 10
  - c) 6
- 9. Which districts were mainly affected by the movement?
  - a) Ambala and Patiala
  - b) Jullandar and Hoshiarpur
  - c) Ferozepur and Kapurthala

Answers:- 1. c 2.a 3.b 4.c 5. b 6 a 7. b 8. c 9. b

## Teja Singh Sumandri

Teja Singh Sumandri, a radical leading Akali leader, took active part in the struggle for the liberation of the Gurdwaras from 1914 to 1926 when he breathed his last breath. He was deeply interested in education and was zealously engaged in propagating Sikh religion. He cherished progressive ideas, recognized the importance of press and patronized Punjabi newspapers. He inherited love for his religion and country.

He was born on February 20, 1881, at village Rai Ka Burj, in the district of Amritsar. His father, Sardar Deva Singh, a retired military person, was a famous political leader. Teja Singh received some education in his childhood and joined the army, but he did not like the army service and resigned after three years. His family was granted land at Sumandri, in the district of Lyallpur (now in Pakistan). The family shifted there and, therefore, the suffix Sumandri came to be attached to his name. He was appointed Head- man of his village after the death of his father.

Though he himself was not highly educated, he did a lot for spreading education. He helped in building a number of schools and colleges, for instance: Middle School, Sumandri, Khalsa High School, Lyallpur, Khalsa High School Sarhali (District Amritsar), and Khalsa College, Lyallpur. He was President of the managing committee of the Khalsa High School at Lyallpur and Manager of the Khalsa High School at Sarhali.

He was one of the founders of the Punjabi Daily newspapers, such as ‘Akali’ and ‘Akali and Pardesi’. He financially helped these papers to overcome their economic problems. He had to sell some of his property for this purpose. These papers promoted the Gurdwara Reform Movement and educated people against the foreign rule.

When the wall of the Gurdwara Rakab Ganj (Delhi) was demolished to build a straight road, he, along with Harchand Singh, actively participated in the agitation against the demolition of the wall. They walked out of the Sikh Educational Conference, held at Jullundher in April 1914, when a strong resolution protesting against the official action of demolishing the wall was disallowed. He severed his connections with the Chief Khalsa Diwan as he thought it was a pro-British organization and became a radical leader.

After the Nankana Sahib tragedy, he joined the Shromani Gurdwara Parbadhank Committee and was one of the 35 members of the first committee formed to control the Gurdwaras. He worked with devotion for the Gurdwara Reform Movement. He kept his companions in high spirits and united in difficulties. He was arrested in connection with the affair of the keys of the Golden Temple. After his release, he took active part in struggle at the Guru-Ka-Bagh and sent many squads to participate in it. He risked his life in the struggle for liberation of the Gurdwaras at Khadur Sahib and Mukatsar.

In October 1923, he, along with his fifty-six companions, was arrested in connection with the confrontation at Jaito and charged with sedition. He was kept first in the Amritsar Jail and then transferred to the Lahore Central Jail. His case lingered in the courts for three years. After the Gurdwara Act was passed in 1925, he was one of those leaders who refused to be released conditionally. He preferred to remain in jail to be released on condition. He was suffering from heart disease and embraced martyrdom in jail on July 17, 1926. In fact, he took to his heart the division among Akali leaders over the question of conditional release.

In a short span of forty-five years, he left a mark after him. He was known for his steadfastness, farsightedness, sincerity, and love for his

religion and country. He was an elected member of the Punjab Provincial Congress committee in 1922. He was also an elected member of the All India Congress Committee. He became Vice-President of the Akali Party. He belonged to a well-to-do family and the S.G.P.C. has named a hall as Teja Singh Sumandri Hall in his honor. His son, Bishan Singh, a famous educationist, served as Principal of the Khalsa College ,Amritsar and later as Vice Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University , Amritsar.

**Questions:**

1. In which year was Teja Singh Sumandri born?
  - a. 1891
  - b. 1895
  - c. 1881
2. In which year did he pass away?
  - a. 1930
  - b. 1926
  - c. 1936
3. What has S.G.P.C. named after him?
  - a. A hall
  - b. A library
  - c. A hospital
4. Why did he leave Chief Khalsa Diwan?
  - a. He was not elected its president.
  - b. He considered it a pro-British organization.
  - C .He could not spare time.
- 5 .Where did he die?
  - a. At home
  - b, In jail.
  - c. In the battlefield.
6. Why did not he want to leave prison?
  - a. He did not want to be released conditionally.
  - b. He felt comfortable in jail.
  - c. He was under treatment in jail.

Answers  
1.c 2. b 3. a 4. b 5. b 6. a

## Sardar Sewa Singh Thikriwala

Sewa Singh Thikriwala, by his selfless fight for the rights of the people and his unique sacrifice, has become immortal. His friends called him “the Living Martyr”. The untold miseries he suffered at the hands of the cruel ruler of the Patiala state, Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, were horrible.

He was born in August 1878 at the village Thikriwala, about three miles from Barnala in the erstwhile princely state of Patiala. His father, Deva Singh, was an important official in the Patiala state. Sewa Singh Thikriwala got his early education at Patiala. When he grew up, he was also appointed as a state official, as he was known as a wise and learned man. But he resigned his job and started taking interest in religious, educational, and political activities. He built a big Gurdwara in his village.

When the Akali Movement for the reform of the Gurdwaras started, he was counted as a leading Sikh leader of the Patiala state. He was elected President of the state Akali party. The Nankana tragedy of 1921 and the disposition of the ruler of Nabha state, Ripudaman Singh, moved his heart deeply and he started playing a leading role in the Akali agitation. He, with his renewed enthusiasm, was a mainspring of the Akali struggle in the states .

In 1923, he organized a conference in his village at which he condemned the ruler of the Patiala state for suppressing the Akali movement. He was arrested, but due to the protest by the public, he was released the next day. Undaunted, he increased his activities by starting a Punjabi journal, Kaumi Dard, and an Urdu weekly, Ryasti Duniya, to create awakening among the peasants.

During the Jaito struggle, he, along with other Akali leaders, was again arrested and held in a jail at Patiala. He was subjected to all types of threats and allurements to sever his connections with the Akali movement. On his refusal, he was sent to the Lahore Fort Jail in the end of 1923. After the Gurdwara Act of 1925 was passed, the Punjab government offered him

conditional release, but he refused to be released conditionally. At last, the government yielded and released him unconditionally in 1926. But he was immediately arrested by the Patiala police on a fake charge and detained in the Patiala jail. It led to a fierce agitation in the state under Baba Kharak Singh, an Akali leader. In July 1928, at a big anti-state conference held at Mansa, the Punjab state Praja Mandal (People's Party) was formed to improve the lot of the farmers and to fight against the injustice of the rulers. He was in jail, but still he was elected President of the above mentioned body. He started a hunger strike as a protest against the maltreatment by the jail officials. When his condition became critical, he was released in August 1929.

The ruler of the Patiala state did not care for his subjects. He was always busy in pleasure seeking activities at the cost of the people. His rule is known for oppression and misery of the people. Sewa Singh Thikriwala started an intensive tour of the state to awaken the people to their rights. He held public meetings and conferences. He raised the slogan, "Maharaja, Gaddi Chhor" (Ruler, leave the throne).

In 1930, state Praja Mandal held a conference at Ludhiana. He, as President of the reception committee, drew a true picture of the injustice and oppression being perpetrated by the ruler of the Patiala state on the helpless people. He led a delegation which met the Viceroy at Delhi and submitted a memorandum mentioning the atrocities of the ruler of Patiala. As soon as he returned to his village, he was arrested. He was tried on made-up charges and sentenced to five years imprisonment and a fine of 2,000 rupees. After four months, the government yielded due to the rising tide of resentment in the public and released him in March 1931.

The ruler of Patiala started negotiations with Sewa Singh in 1931, but failed to win his favor as he demanded an elected assembly in the state. In the same year, Sewa Singh Thikriwala went to Shimla and discussed with Mahatma Gandhi the problem of the people of Patiala. In the end of the year, Sewa Singh Thikriwala started an agitation against the oppressive rule of the Jind state. He was arrested but the government had to bow to public demand for his release in 1932. In the same year, he was arrested and detained for three months by the Maler Kotla state government for his attending the Kothala conference. Now the movement had spread so widely that mere suppression did not work. Sewa Singh Thikriwala had become a

popular embodiment of defiance and agitation was resumed with greater vigor.

Praja Mandal held its next conference at Delhi in April 1933. Sewa Singh Thikriwala demanded inquiries against the rulers on their crimes against the people. He pressed the British government to check the despot and tyrant ruler of the Patiala state from murdering innocent people. He was declared a rebel by the government and arrested by the Patiala police from his village in September 1933. He was tried, but in the court he did not defend himself, and said to the judge, "I don't expect justice from you. Your only business is to please your ruler. Do whatever you want, but fast". He was sentenced to six years of imprisonment and a fine of two thousand rupees and sent to Central Jail, Patiala.

In the jail, he was treated like a criminal. He was not allowed to meet or talk to anybody. He could not write or receive a letter. The food given to him was unfit even for a dog. He lost his health and in May 1934, he went on an indefinite fast. He was offered every kind of inducement if he gave up political activities, but this true servant of the people spurned these offers. With determination, he continued his fast for more than four months. Attempts to force food down his throat failed. He was reduced to a physical wreck and he started vomiting blood. He was taken to the Rajindra hospital where he passed away on January 20, 1935. His body was cremated under suspicious circumstances. None of his relatives were present at the time of his cremation. Even his last remains were not given to his wife. They remained hanging by a tree.

In 1938, when Maharaja Bhupinder Singh passed away, Yadvinder Singh ascended to the throne. He returned the ashes of Sewa Singh to his relatives. They were taken to his village in a procession. On the way, people paid homage to the ashes. In his village, a memorial service was attended by his innumerable admirers, including political leaders. A school named after him was built in his village. The road linking his village to Barnala is called Shahid Sewa Singh road. On the Mall Road of Patiala, there is his statue that reminds us of his sacrifices for the public.

Sewa Singh was an unrepentant man of iron will. He had become the focal point of all seditious activities against the misrule of the Patiala state. Discussing his personality, one of his admirers remarked, "Men, not buildings, make institutions, and we have none to stand up to him." He, with

his mass influence and organizational ability, was largely responsible for the success of the movement. The role of unflinching leaders like Sewa Singh assumes special significance.

### Questions

1. In which year was Sewa Singh born?
  - a. 1888 b. 1878 c. 1868
2. When did he die?
  - a. 1935 b. 1934 c. 1936
3. How did he die?
  - a. He was hanged.
  - b. He died a natural death.
  - c. He died due to a prolonged hunger strike in prison.
4. Why was he put behind bars?
  - a. He wanted democracy in the state.
  - b. He was a murderer.
  - c. He was a thief.
5. To which state did he belong?
  - a. Nabha
  - b. Malerkotla
  - c. Patiala
6. What has been erected in Patiala in his memory?
  - a. A hospital.
  - b. His statue.
  - c. A library.
7. What type of person was he?
  - a. He was an ordinary man.
  - b. He was a leader who fought until his last breath for the rights of the people.
  - c. He was a robber.

### Answers:

1. b 2.a 3. c 4. a 5. c 6. b 7. b

Sardar Bhagat Singh

Bhagat Singh belonged to a family of revolutionaries that stood for reform and freedom of the country. He was imbued from childhood with the family's spirit of patriotism. At the time of his birth, his father was in jail for taking part in Colonization Bill Agitation. The execution of Kartar Singh Sarabha made a deep impression on the mind of this young man who vowed to dedicate his life to the country. His grandfather, Arjan Singh, took keen interest in the Indian National Congress. His uncle, Ajit Singh, was member of the Gadar party, founded in the USA to route the British rule in India. He was also jailed for raising his voice in favor of farmers and against Colonization Act in 1906-7. On his release, he was forced to flee to Iran as he wrote anti-British articles. From there he went to Turkey, Austria, Germany and finally to Brazil.

Bhagat Singh was born at village Banga in Layalpur district of the Punjab (now in Pakistan) on 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1907. He was the second son of Kishan Singh and Vidya Vati. He was a handsome youth of sharp features, smart, promising and impressive personality. His face reflected his wisdom. He was determined to do something for his country and did not believe in any religion. He possessed an extraordinary ability.

After passing his 10<sup>th</sup> grade exam, at the call of the national leaders to boycott government aided institutions, he joined National College, Lahore, which was established to turn out patriots. There he started a secret association for the youth and named it 'Naujwan Bharat Sabha' (Association of Indian Youth) which had members of all the sects and religions. They used to print handouts to spread political awareness. It was not permitted at that time and was punishable with imprisonment. Due to state repression; this association could not spread its message beyond the colleges at Lahore.

When his parents wanted him to marry, he told his mother that his country required his sacrifice and refused to marry. He further said, "If the marriage is to take place in slave India, my bride shall be death." He had a seething memory of the Jalianwala Bagh massacre (1919) where about one thousand persons were killed and thousands were injured. He went to this spot to collect soil from the park of Jalianwala in his lunch box as a memento for life. To avoid early marriage, he left home and went to Kanpur where he took up a job in the Partap Press. Owner of this press was Shri Ganesh Shankar, a famous patriot. There he proved to be a good field worker and preacher. He read revolutionary literature in his spare time. He also joined the Hindustan Republican Association, a radical group.

When he was assured that he would not be forced to marry, he returned to Lahore. At that time, the Jaito agitation started by the Akalis was going on and he accorded welcome to a group of agitators. Warrants for his arrest were issued, but he managed to elude the police and spent a few months in Delhi. There he changed his name to Balwant Singh and worked in a daily paper 'Vir Arjan'.

When the Akali agitation ended, he returned to Lahore. He established contacts with 'Kirti Kisan Party (a party of farmers and workers) through Sohan Singh Josh, a communist leader. He regularly contributed to its magazine and became secretary of the regenerated 'Naujwa Bhart Sabha'. He also remained in touch with the Socialist Republic Association.

Anti-British feelings were spreading among Indians. Noting that resentment was spreading, the government appointed a commission under the leadership of Sir John Simon in 1928. There was no Indian on this commission. As the commission arrived in Lahore, an all parties' huge procession headed by Lal Lajpat Rai marched to protest. Intercepting the procession, the police made a Lathi (Stick) Charge. Lala Lajpat Rai was seriously injured and died after a fortnight. Bhagat Singh was an eye witness to this morbid scene and vowed to take revenge. He and Raj Guru plotted to kill Mr. Scott who was responsible for the charge. Owing to a mistake in identification, J. P. Saunders, an Assistant Superintendent of police died as a result of shooting by Bhagat Singh.

Bhagat Singh fled from Lahore to escape death punishment. He disguised himself as a wealthy person. After getting himself clean-shaven, he put on a flat hat and dodging the police, escaped to Calcutta. He remained in hiding for several months. He became active when Public Safety Bill and Trade Dispute Bill were being debated in the Central Assembly in Delhi. These were repressive measures and gave more power to the police. Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt volunteered to explode a bomb in the Assembly Hall to express disapproval of the bills. They managed to enter the visitor gallery of the Assembly Hall. Bhagat Singh jumped up and threw a harmless bomb in the hall when the bill was being passed. There was an explosion, but it was a carefully laid out plot and no one was injured. It was not thrown to cause death or injury, but to draw the attention of the government and show resentment against the repressive laws being enacted.

Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt shouted revolutionary slogans like Long Live Revolution (Inqlab Zindabad) and threw leaflets explaining their intention of making 'the deaf hear' with the loud noise of explosion. Both were immediately arrested. As the trial proceeded, Bhagat Singh stated,"

Force used for a legitimate cause has its moral justification” Both were found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment for life. Meanwhile approvers identified Bhagat Singh as a killer in the Saunders Murder Case (Lahore Conspiracy Case). While the case was going on, Bhagat Singh started indefinite hunger strike against the ill treatment of political prisoners in the Lahore Jail. Many prisoners joined the strike. Only after the death of one of them in September, 1929, demands were accepted and the hunger strike was abandoned.

Bhagat Singh offered no defense at the trial. He utilized it to promote his fight against slavery. He kept delaying the proceedings by refusing to appear before the court. He did not disown the crime. He gave a fiery statement and said that the killing was symbolic of freedom struggle. Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukhdev were sentenced to death. They heard the sentence with defiant courage. He wanted to be shot like a soldier and not to die at the gallows, but his request was refused.

While Bhagat Singh was waiting for execution, he desired to see Bhai Randhir Singh, a saintly person, who was also a political prisoner in the jail and whose time for release was approaching. A Muslim jailer arranged a meeting between them. As written by Bhai Randhir Singh in his book ‘Jail Chithian (letters from Jail), Bhagat Singh confessed that he had been up to that time an atheist and had become clean shaven to disguise himself. He also admitted that after meeting Bhai Randhir Singh, a new awakening had come to him and he had already started keeping long hair.

He was in high spirits when he was hanged on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1931. He shouted for the last time his favorite slogan ‘Long Live Revolution and Down with British Imperialism’ His body was secretly cremated by the police at village Hussainivalla and his remains were thrown into the river Satluj. Next day, a huge procession was taken in Lahore and glowing tributes were paid to him for his sacrifice, Mourning for him throughout India was spontaneous and widespread. After 1947, the Government of India procured from the Pakistan Government the land where Bhagat Singh and his comrades were cremated and built a memorial. Every year, these martyrs are remembered and a fair is held there on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

Bhagat Singh is remembered by the title of ‘Shahid-i-Azam (the Greatest of Martyrs). He has become a legendary hero for the masses. Many songs have been composed appreciating his sacrifice. He is ideal of the youth throughout India. His martyrdom spread the desire for freedom among Indians and forced the British to free India. He has made himself

immortal by his unique sacrifice. His name will always be mentioned with honor in the history of India,

Paying his tributes, Subhas Chandra Bose said in 1931 “Bhagat Singh who set an example of character and patriotism by sacrificing himself for the sake of the country’s freedom, was from the Sikh community. Today, he is known to be a brave Sikh hero throughout the world. The Sikh community has to produce thousand of Bhagat Singhs for the cause of the country.’

### Questions.

1. In which year was Bhagat Singh born?  
a) 1909 b) 1907 c) 1905
2. Name the village where he was born.  
a) Banga b) Khatkar Kalan c) Lyalpur.
3. What was the name of his father?  
a) Ajit Singh b) Arjan Singh c) Kishan Singh.
4. What was the name of his mother?  
a) Sabhrai b) Amarjit c) Vidiya Vati.
5. What was his age when he was hanged?  
a) 34 b) 24 c) 44.
6. Why was he hanged?  
a) He killed innocent persons.  
b) He threw a bomb in the Assembly Hall.  
c) He killed a police officer.
7. Where was he cremated?  
a) in his village b) at Hussainivala c) at Ferozepur.
8. Why did he refuse to marry?  
a) He wanted to free his country before his marriage.  
b) He did not like his would be wife.

c) He wanted to marry after finishing his education.

9. What type of man was he?

a) He was a bad man.

b) He was a patriot who sacrificed his life for the freedom of his country.

c) He was lazy and shirker.

10. Why did he kill the police officer?

a) The officer abused him.

b) He wanted to take revenge of the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.

c) The officer was corrupt.

11. Why did he throw the bomb?

a) He wanted to kill someone.

b) He was testing his bomb.

c) He wanted to protest against the repressive laws that were being enacted.

12. Whom did he want to follow?

a) Kartat Singh Sarabha

b) Mahatma Gandhi

c) Moti Lal Nehru.

Answers.

1. b 2. a 3. c 4. c 5. b 6. c 7. b 8. a 9. b 10. b 11. c 12. a

## Sardar Udham Singh

Udham Singh was a man of great courage, determination and action. He was a true follower of Bhagat Singh who was his role model and like him looked upon death as a bride, he was going to marry. He remained cheerful to the last and went joyfully to the gallows to avenge a national insult perpetrated upon his mother land. He was a militant nationalist and had a lot of self confidence.

His original name was Sher Singh. He was born on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1899 at Sunam, (then in Patiala state) district Sangrur, Punjab. His mother died when he was only 2 years old and his father, Tehal Singh, breathed his last breath when he was only five. His father was a poor man and worked as a watchman on a railway crossing near Sunam, He and his brother were admitted to the Central Khalsa Orphanage, Amritsar in 1907. Both the brothers were administered the Sikh initiatory rites at the orphanage and were given new names. He was named Udham Singh and his brother was given the name of Sher Singh. In 1917, Udham Singh witnessed another tragedy when his brother died and left him alone. Thus, he had a rough childhood, and could not bear the sufferings of others.

He left orphanage after passing his examination at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade in 1918. He witnessed the Jalianwala Bagh massacre where a peaceful unarmed assembly of people was fired upon by General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer killing hundreds and injuring thousands. He defied curfew and was wounded when he was rescuing the husband of Mrs. Ratna Devi, a person unrelated to him. He was deeply moved by this bloody scene. This tragedy was deeply engraved in the mind of this future martyr, Udham Singh, and it proved a turning point in his life. According to Swarn Singh, with whom he stayed in Srinagar, he was deeply touched by this tragedy and he took a solemn pledge to kill the real culprit, the Governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael O' Dwyer. In fact, the massacre turned him to the path of revolution.

He left for Africa from where he went to the USA. There he became interested in revolutionary activities in progress on the Pacific Coast. He was called back by Bhagat Singh, whom he considered his Guru, and returned to India with arms. Now he was a clean shaven Sikh. He was arrested for possessing arms and sentenced to 4 years rigorous

imprisonment. The impact of the Russian Revolution on him can be judged by the fact that among the revolutionary literature, found in his possession by the raiding party, was ‘ Russi Ghaddar Gian Samachar’ a tract about Russian revolution ‘

On release in the end of 1931, he visited Sunam, but harassed by the police, returned to Amritsar and started working as a signboard painter. Now he changed his name to Ram Muhammad Singh Azad to emphasize unity of all the religious communities in India. In 1932, he disguised himself as a saint and visited Srinagar where he stayed with Indar Singh and Swaran Singh. As stated by them, he was deeply influenced by the activities of Bhagat Singh. He carried Bhagat Singh’s portrait with him and referred to him as his master. He loved to sing revolutionary songs and was a fan of Ram Parsad Bismal, a leading revolutionary poet of that time. He also worked as a carpenter and mechanic for a few days in Srinagar. After staying for some months in Srinagar, Udham Singh left India by duping the police and reached London by the mid-thirties stopping in many countries on the way. Here he joined an engineering course. In fact, he was waiting for a chance to avenge the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy.

The long-awaited opportunity came on 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1940, about 21 years after the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh. On that day, when a meeting was being held in the Caxton Hall, Udham Singh fired 6 shots from his pistol at Sir Michael O’ Dwyer, the former Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab who had approved the action of General Dyer. O’ Dwyer died on the spot and Zelland, the Secretary of State for India was.” injured. Udham Singh made no attempt to escape and surrendered, saying to the police,” I have done my duty to my country. You may do whatever you like.”

While in prison, he wrote some letters to S.S Johal, Secretary of a Gurdwara in London. In one of his letters dated 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1940, he requested him not to fight his case. He writes,” If you come to know who those people are helping me, please tell them not to do so, I will be glad if they spend this money on education of their children.” He also wrote,” I am never afraid of dying. So soon I will be getting married with execution. I am not sorry as I am a soldier of my country. It is since 10 years when my best friend has left me behind and I am sure after my death I will see him as he is waiting for me.” It seems he was thinking of Bhagat Singh. These letters reveal a true picture of his mind. In one letter, he treats himself to be guest of Royal Family.

He was charged with murder of O’ Dwyer. Krishna Menon fought his case, but could not save him as his own statement was against him. An appeal was also dismissed. He was sentenced to death by Justice Atkinson in

July, 1940. He was hanged on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1940 in London. The Judge directed the press not to report any of the statements made by Udham Singh in the court. The British courts were able to silence for long the last words of Udham Singh. At last, his speech has been released from the British Public Records Office. Echoes of Kartar Singh Sarabha and Bhagat Singh can be found in the words of Udham Singh in the wake of the assassination of O'Dwyer. In a statement given on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1940, he said, "I just shot to make my protest. I have seen people starving under the British Imperialism. I have done it, the pistol was off 3 or 4 times. I am not sorry for protesting. It was my duty to do so. I do not mind if I am hanged. Facing the judge, he exclaimed, "Down with the British Imperialism".

During the trial, Udham Singh made a request that his ashes be sent back to his country, but his request was denied. In 1975, the Government of India succeeded in bringing his ashes home. Millions of people gathered on the occasion to pay homage.

Udham Singh's act is a unique example of firm and successful determination to avenge a national insult.

### Questions.

1. Where was Udham Singh born?  
a) Patiala b) Amritsar c) Sunam
2. In which year was he born?  
a) 1899 b) 1902 c) 1897
3. What was the name of his father?  
a) Sadhu Singh b) Tehal Singh c) Puran Singh
4. Why was he brought up in an orphanage?  
a) His parents were very poor.  
b) His poor parents died in his childhood and there was none to support him.  
c) He ran away from home and joined the orphanage.
5. Who was his role model?  
a) Mahatma Gandhi b) Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru c) Bhagat Singh
6. Why did he go to London?  
a) for sight seeing b) to kill the person responsible for the tragedy of the Jallianwala Bagh c) to study.
7. Why was he hanged?

- a) He killed O' Dwyer b) He set the House of Commons on fire. C) He smuggled arms.
8. In which city was he hanged?  
a) Delhi b) Amritsar c) London
9. How did he face death?  
a) He was trembling with fear.  
b) He was cheerful.  
c) He was crying and weeping.

**Answers.**

1. c 2. a 3. b 4. b 5.c 6. b 7. a 8. c 9. b

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